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HINDUISM'S POINTS OF CONTACT WITH CHRISTIANITY.

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I. Introductory Remarks: three early theories to explain likenesses of other religions to Christianity; the attitude of the science of religion; special application to Hinduism.—II. The Godhead: Hindu sects divided into six classes on this basis; analogies to Christianity; a personal God in both; the Trinity in both; conclusion.

I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

Before the rise of the science of religions it was customary to account for analogies observed between Christian and pagan doctrines and cults by one of three theories: (1) a direct borrowing on the pagan side, either from some Christian sect or from Judaism; (2) survival among the pagans of fragments or reminiscences of a primeval revelation; (3) wilful imitation by evil spirits of the truths and practices of Christianity, for the purpose of leading souls astray and retarding the world's conversion.

With the advance of knowledge the supposed analogies were found in most cases to be spurious, and all three explanations became discredited.

In that period when science, in her juvenile lawlessness, had nothing but blows for her mother religion, a different set of analogies, supposed to be discreditable, were assiduously sought for and attributed to a borrowing on the part of Christianity from pagan sources.

With the decline of encyclopedism, and the development of the true scientific spirit, as opposed to a partisan one, the theory of an independent and parallel rise and development of Christian and pagan notions and practices came into vogue. Among theistic scholars this hypothesis has, especially of recent years, shaded into that of a primitive revelation, which, indeed, even in its boldest and most definite form, has never lacked defenders.

But whatever be one's theory of religious origins, and whatever view one takes of the relations in which the Christian religion stands and should stand to non-Christian systems, a serious and candid comparison between Christian and pagan thought can in no case fail to be highly useful and instructive.

Christian believers may well look upon such evident resemblances to Christianity as are found in other religions as valuable confirmations of its teachings. This will hold good, whether they be attributed to direct Jewish or Christian influences, to a primitive revelation, or to an independent unfolding or illumination of the mind and soul. To missionaries, and to those, too, who find themselves obliged to combat paganizing influences upon our own soil, the investigation of such resemblances, especially in the case of the religions of India, is of incalculable value.

The first apostles of Christianity among the Hindus in modern times believed that they recognized in the Trimûrti a corrupted form of the doctrine of the Trinity, and found numerous other points of resemblance. A growing knowledge of the Vaidik family of religions seemed to prove that the Trimûrti was a modern invention, having only the most superficial resemblance to the Christian Trinity; and that the religion of India, with its two phases of cold impersonal pantheism and vulgar polytheistic idolatry, was morally and intellectually antipodal to the Christian faith.

But the further advance of scholarship has made manifest the wonderful complexity of the so-called Hinduism, and the great diversity of the religions and philosophies grouped under that common head. Incidentally it has revived some of the old analogies, brought to light numbers of new ones of a more real and substantial character than those at first remarked, and in some cases has narrowed the distance between Christian and Hindu conceptions which hitherto seemed glaringly contradictory.

In our comparison of certain Hindu doctrines with corresponding Christian ones it will be convenient to arrange them

under three heads: Theology, Cosmology and Soteriology; or, God, Creation and Salvation; the typical Hindu conceptions being in the first case *Brahma*, in the second *mâyâ*, and in the third the three *mârgas* or roads to *moksha* (salvation or liberation).

II. THE GODHEAD.

Although the conceptions of Brahman and Mâyâ may be truly said to be the most characteristic features of Hindu religious thought, they are far from being universally accepted among the Hindus, even in modern times.

In the form in which they are familiar to the European public they are characteristic of the monistic (*advaita*) schools. I am assured on excellent native authority that although nine-tenths of the Brâhmanas are monists (*advaita-vâdins*) nine-tenths of the people of India, taken as a whole, are dualists (*dvaita-vâdins*). Moreover, in several *advaita* schools the conceptions referred to exist only in a modified form, if at all.

The religious and philosophical sects of India may be divided into six classes, as regards their conception of God: (1) Those that believe in a Supreme Personal Deity, eternally existing, distinct from the universe; (2) those that believe in a Supreme Personal Deity, eternally existing, but including the universe as one of the manifestations of his own essence; (3) those that believe in a Supreme Personal Deity, not eternal, but a periodic emanation (using this word in a loose sense) from an almost impersonal Universal Being; (4) those that believe in a Supreme Personal Deity, not eternal, who is simply the highest of the net-work of illusions of which the universe consists; (5) those who believe in eternally existing impersonal Spirit, distinct from the visible universe; (6) those who deny the existence of spirit, or of any deity or Supreme Being of any kind.

1. The first class includes the Madhvâ'cârya Vaishnavas, and several philosophies associated with the 'Saiva sects, namely, the Pa'supata, Saiva, Nyâya, Pratyâbhijna, Vai'seshika and the older Yoga. The Madhvâ'câryas call God Vishnu, the others apply to him the various names and epithets of 'Siva.

2. To the second belong three very important Vaishnava

sects, the Râmânujas, or 'Sri Vaishnavas, especially prevalent in the south of India, the Râmânandas of northern India, and the 'Caitanyas of Bengal.

3. The third is represented by the Vallabhâ'câryas, a sect very numerous in central and northeastern parts of the country ; and probably also includes the Râdha Vallabhas—a sect calling itself Vaishnava, but having close affinities with the 'Saivas and 'Sâktas, —apparently the Kabir and Dâdû sects, and possibly the Pâniniya branch of the Pûrva Mimânsâ philosophy.

4. The fourth, the Kaivalyâdvaita (absolute monism), is the typical Vedânta, and is sustained chiefly by the monks (*sannyâsis*) of the order founded by 'Sankarâ'cârya, and the Smârta sect of Southern India, but also found among Hindus of many other sects and cults, especially those of the Brâhman caste.

5. To the fifth class belong the Sâṅkhya, and at least one school of the Pûrva Mimânsâ.

6. The sixth class is composed of the materialistic sects, notably the 'Carvakas of ancient times and the 'Sûnya-vâdins of the present.

The sects in the first group may be called theistic, and the Brahma Samâj, and kindred modern societies, would have to be classed with it, if they were sufficiently Hindu in their character to fall properly within our notice. Those in the second, third and fourth groups would ordinarily be considered pantheistic, and the fifth and sixth are unquestionably atheistic.

The atheistic schools have always tended to become something other : the Sâṅkhya passing into the Yoga, 'Saiva or Pa'supata, and the 'Sûnya, as soon as it ceases to be flippant, becoming the Kaivalyâdvaita.

The three *advaita* schools, the *Kaivalya* of 'Sankara (4), the *Vî'suddha* of Vallabha (3), and the *Vî'sishta* of Râmânuja (2) agree (with perhaps some exceptions among subdivisions or individual adherents of the first two) in recognizing a personal Lord (*I'svara*) who governs the universe by his thought and will. Although to the Kaivalyâdvaitins he is simply the crowning illusion, and the ultimate being is Brahma, of which nothing

positive can be properly predicated, not even existence ; to the Vi'suddhâdvaita he is as it were the consubstantial Logos, or active manifestation, of a Brahman who is in some sense intelligent and free ; and to the Vi'sishtâdvaita an eternal aspect, nay, the highest and essential aspect, of Brahman himself.

All this is strongly suggestive of Christian theism, but the dvaita sects present more remarkable analogies. To the Nyâya, the Yoga and the Vai'seshika God seems to be simply a Supreme Everlasting Spirit, without any internal differentiation ; to the Pratyabhijnas he is no more than that ; but the Pa'supata and 'Saiva systems give him a richness of interior life which immediately suggests the Christian Trinity. They find in him three or five operations or aspects, inseparable from his eternal being. The three aspects are Brahmâ, Vishnu and Rudra (creative, preservative, and destructive), and the five are made up of these with the addition of grace and "obscuration." The last named may be understood as the *mystery*, or the interior unmanifested activity, of the Godhead (although it is usually given a cosmogonic interpretation) ; and grace in the Christian sense, as its pervasive sanctifying influence.

The Trimûrti then remains as nearly a true Trinity, to which most of the formulæ of the Athanasian creed would be entirely appropriate. The Creator, Preserver and Transmuter (for 'Siva represents not only destruction, but also regeneration, and liberation from the power of both), worshipped by many Hindus as aspects of One Undivided Godhead, are comparable with the Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier which form the Christian Trinity. The notion of the Trinity prevalent among a certain school of early theologians, and further developed by Hegel in modern times, according to which the Son is the middle, and the Spirit the final term in the creative manifestation of Deity, is particularly akin to the Hindu conception.

Brahmâ seems to represent the primary efflux of creative energy ; Vishnu, its perpetual providential activity ; and 'Siva its final outcome in the cosmos and in the natural and spiritual man.

With them may be compared the triad of the Veda Mantras : Surya, Indra and Âgni. The *Rig Veda* itself identifies Surya

with Vishnu, and Indra with Rudra (*i. e.*, 'Siva'); and Âgni may very easily have developed into Brahmâ. The three seem to have been symbolized by, if not identified with, the three forms of Âgni—the celestial, atmospheric and terrestrial fire; for Surya was (or was associated with) the sun, Rudra the storm, and Âgni the fire of the household and altar.

In the *Rig Veda* (tenth mandala, hymn 121) we find Âgni thus invoked :

“ One in thine essence, but to mortals three ;
 Displaying thine eternal triple form
 As fire on earth, as lightning in the air,
 As sun in heaven.”

It would be possible, without much over-subtlety, to use this as a symbol either of the Christian Trinity or of the 'Saiva Trimûrti.

Not only in the Vaidik mythology, not only in the Personal Deity of theistic Hinduism, do we find suggestions of the Trinity idea; but also in the fundamental postulates of most of the pantheistic and atheistic systems.

We can dismiss what has been called the “trinity” of the Sâṅkhya philosophy in a few words, because of its apparent remoteness from the notion of Deity. In this system, which has profoundly influenced the whole thought of India, the universe is produced by evolution from *prakṛiti* (matter), which has three qualities (*gunas*), of which it is “generally defined as the equilibrium”; namely, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, *i. e.*, passiveness, restlessness, and grossness. It is by the “spontaneous differentiation” of these three inherent properties that evolution is said to take place. By the Vaishnavas, who are for the most part largely indebted to the Sâṅkhya, *Prakṛiti* has a higher meaning, and the three *gunas* extend even to the Trimûrti, Vishnu having *sattva*, Brahmâ *rajas*, and 'Siva *tamas*.

This leads us to the pantheistic systems, which all attribute in some sense to Brahman, however they regard him in other respects, *sat*, '*cit* and *ânanda*—being, knowledge, and bliss.

If the mediæval scholastic explanations of the Trinity be taken as the Christian term of the comparison, the resemblance in

this point becomes very pronounced. As they represented the accepted Catholic theology, and as orthodox Protestantism has never reviewed the conclusions of the latter on the nature and attributes of God, or consciously revised or amended in any way the doctrine of the Trinity, they may perhaps be legitimately used.

According to the great theologians of the Trinity, the Father may be said to be the Divine Power, the Fountainhead of Deity; the Son the Divine Wisdom, the Word of God spoken within in his own bosom; and the Holy Spirit "the Consubstantial Love of the Father and the Son." *Filius procedit ut Verbum intellectus; Spiritus Sanctus ut amor voluntatis* (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa*, I, xlv, vii.)

Here we have the Being (or Power), Wisdom and Love of God, with which to compare the Being, Knowledge and Bliss of Brahman. In each case the second term is of the intellectual order, and the third of the affective. The analogy is still closer when we remember that, just as 'Sankara, the greatest of the Vedântists, while recognizing in Brahman this triune character, asserts that it is entirely without attributes; so in like manner the Christian theologian Aquinas defines God, as do many others after him, as *Actus Purissimus*, which will bear the translation of Most Simple Energy, and asserts that he is one and undifferentiated, and "his being and act are identical."

If, in spite of the similarity of definitions, the 'Sankara Vedântists (*Kaivalyâdvaita-vâdins*) deny personality to Brahman, while the Christians assert it of God, this may be at least partly explained on the ground that in one the philosophical and in the other the religious interest predominates. This is beautifully illustrated in the very difference of nomenclature in the two cases. Power, Wisdom and Love are outgoing, dynamic, and, so to speak, altruistic attributes—they form something for the creature to cling to; while Being, Knowledge and Bliss are static, and sound like the wholly egoistic advantages of a self-centered, self-confined being. The same remark may be made regarding the fundamental nature of the Divine Essence, which is said in the first case to be Energy (*actus*), and in the second, Knowledge (*'cit*).

The chief exponents and preachers of the Vedânta—the sannyâsis of 'Sankara's institute—are obliged to concede the insufficiency of the abstract conceptions of their philosophy for the religious needs of the masses of the people, and consequently preach habitually to the latter in the dualistic terms of popular religion. But if they were to identify I'svara (Lord), the Logos, with the 'Cit—as distinguished from the Sat and Ânanda—of Brahman, and could recognize that a Being that can be called *Sa'c'citânanda* (Being, Knowledge and Bliss) must be personal, or, to borrow the more exact expression of the Areopagite, super-personal, the apparent gulf between Brahman and the Christian Godhead would be definitely bridged.

Two of the Vedânta schools, the Vi'sishtâdvaita ("modified monism") and the Vi'suddhâdvaita ("purified monism"), approximate to this; the first by its recognition that the Personal Deity (*I'svara*, by it called Vishnu) is an eternal manifestation, or rather the Very Self of the all-inclusive Brahma, and the second by its doctrine that the gods and the universe are differentiated according to the proportion in which the Divine being, knowledge and bliss enter into each, from which we may gather that I'svara is the fulness of the the Divine Wisdom (literally, Knowledge). It should be added that one of the dvaita schools, that of Mâdhva, is based upon the Vedânta Sûtras, and doubtless recognizes, consequently, the Sat, 'Cit and Ânanda of Brahman, in which case it, too, is an undeveloped Trinitarianism.

It is interesting to note that there is an apparent duplication in the Trinity of the Âdvaita, as all its schools are accustomed to recognize the Trimûrti as aspects of I'svara. I think it probable that a further investigation of their theology will reveal in some cases such a blending of the two triads as would make the resemblance to the Occidental Trinity in its popularly accepted form even more marked than in any of the cases we have noticed.

A thorough study of the theology of the Vaishnava Advaitins (Vi'suddhâdvaita and Vi'sishtâdvaita) would probably throw light upon the exact relation, if any, which exists between the three *gunas* above referred to (*passiveness*, *restlessness* and *grossness*), and the three attributes (if the Kaivalyâdvaitins will par-

don me the expression) of Brahman; for Prakṛiti and her qualities play an important part in their cosmogonic systems. As they, like other Vaishnavas, distribute the gunas among the members of the Trimūrti (either aspects or emanations of I'svara), it would seem that the solution of the whole problem of Hindu Trinitarianism must be looked for from them.

I think I have said enough to show that Christian Trinitarians, and Christian theists of every school, would find an abundance of common ground with most of the Hindu theologies. It would evidently not be a difficult task for Brahmā, Vishnu and 'Siva, the equivalents of Âgni, Surya and Indra, to be correlated with the Sat, 'Cit and Ânanda of Brahman, and these with the Divine Being, Wisdom and Love, which by so many Christian theologians have been identified with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Leaving aside all speculative interpretations and identifications, the facts may be summed up roughly in the statement that there is in the *Rîg Veda* a trinity of divine personalities, in the Vedānta philosophy a trinity of attributes or predicates of Deity, in the Sāṅkhya philosophy, a trinity of cosmic qualities; and in the Trimūrti a personal Divine nature, actually triune. So that if any one doubt the validity of the detailed comparisons above made, he must at least admit that there is in the Hindu mind not only a strong sense of the personality of God, but a traditional tendency to a line of thought which would seem to have its legitimate outcome in the doctrine of the Trinity.